

## ***The Ethical, Political and Economic Challenges of Effective Altruism***



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### **Introduction**

Contemporary problems of poverty and famine, the lack of access to clean water, wars and conflicts, poses an ethical question: how shall I/we respond to these challenges? What can be done to solve these problems? What are our moral obligations in the context of the severe circumstances that many people on Earth are facing? A possible answer to these questions, that is raising popularity, can be found in the philosophy and social movement called effective altruism [later EA]. Among the main originators of the movement and authors of the philosophical idea behind it are philosophers William MacAskill and Peter Singer. According to proponents of EA, there is a very clear answer to the above-mentioned issues and questions: we, as individuals, should do much more in order to solve these problems, and our moral obligations are very clear. We should search for the best way to influence the world for the better and to make the best usage of our resources, “impartially considered” (MacAskill 2019, 10).

We would like to propose some arguments against the effective altruism’s approach to the world’s problems.<sup>1</sup> These arguments are going to concern practical examples of the negative impact of concentrating on effectiveness, the problem of the relationship between means and ends, as well as the influence of EA on thinking about political life. In other words, we will try to show that other answers to questions posed by EA are possible and viable. Questions such as: how to evaluate the effectiveness of our charitable

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<sup>1</sup> However, it is worth noting at the very beginning that we do not want to repeat the arguments against moral obligations in general, or state that it is impossible to achieve the goals of effective altruists. These are also important moral issues, but we agree that moral philosophy needs to reach for ideals, which at first sight are impossible to achieve, or that common sense in ethical thinking is not always right and that improvements in that matter might rely on philosophical arguments (see McMahan 2012, 5–6). In other words, in this paper we will be taking many opinions for granted in order to concentrate our counterarguments against the most crucial issues in effective altruism.

actions? What does it mean to achieve the most good in charitable actions? What is wrong with ignoring the broader context of your charitable actions? What does it mean that EA ignores the division between means and ends? Why should EA take into consideration ethics, economics and politics?

In William MacAskill's opinion, we should apply reason and evidence to our philanthropic activities. Our actions should have the greatest possible influence and translate into positive change in the world (MacAskill 2015, 18). In order to achieve these goals, we should follow effective altruism, which according to its proponents, is a solution to many ethical conflicts, and that economists and ethicists can finally meet and address our doubts. Therefore, in a way, we should cherish it as an end to the constant quarrels over values, virtues, and obligations. Finally, we could also obtain concrete answers to what we need to do in order to be good.

According to MacAskill, in order to understand effective altruism, we should take a look at altruism and effectiveness. He writes:

altruism simply means improving the lives of others. Many people believe that altruism should denote sacrifice, but if you can do good while maintaining a comfortable life for yourself, that's a bonus, and I'm very happy to call that altruism (MacAskill 2015, 18).

This is a visible change to the usual way of using the term, which includes in its meaning 'disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others' (Oxford Dictionaries). Making obsolete the tension between disinterested and selfless action on the one hand, and those which are realized in order to achieve our own goals and interests on the other hand, is one of the great innovations of effective altruists. This obsolescence is often achieved by claiming that ethical behavior can be at the same time good for both us and others. By helping others we benefit ourselves. At the same time, this help does not need to involve much trouble or sacrificing our own interests (Singer 2015, 101–104). However, what if there is a conflict between what is most effective and most altruistic? The theoretical framework of an effective altruist may negatively influence our ability to recognize such situations. MacAskill writes that he understands effectiveness in the following way:

doing the most good with whatever resources you have. Importantly, effective altruism is (...) about trying to make the most difference you can. Determining whether something is effective means recognizing that some ways of doing good are better than others (MacAskill 2015, 18–19).

The dictionary definition of 'effective' states that it means "successful in producing a desired or intended result" (Oxford Dictionaries). When we think of our altruistic behavior, our main concern and goal is to help another human being. While being effective, we are not concerned with other people and their dignity, but we strive for the best way to achieve something. These two different motivations may give rise to various conflicts of values. Such conflicts will be hard to recognize from the perspective of effective altruism,

which relies on diminishing the difference between the two.

Peter Singer presents effective altruism as the best possible way for making our lives more moral in general (Singer 2015, 4–10). Applying effective altruism to ethics, in general, would mean making genuine differences between distinct ethical views less important, as those differences are an obstacle to being effective in being altruistic. However, the existing differences between ethical views are not a matter of empty scholasticism. Rather, they allow us to express the genuine differences between diverse world-views. This is hard to grasp after applying the perspective of effective altruism.

## **1. The Results of a Practical Implementation of EA**

In order to explain how EA neglects important aspects of moral commitments, we will refer to young professionals – Matt Wage (Singer 2015) and Jason Trigg (Matthews 2013; Singer 2015, 45) who have followed the so-called ‘earning to give’ career model. The main idea of this approach is to consciously seek a high-earning career in order to donate to charity as much money as possible. The wage and Trigg examples show the most important flaws of EA advocated by Singer and MacAskill when it is realized. The above-mentioned professionals have been influenced by EA ideas and decided to start working for the financial sector to earn as much as possible in order to give a big part of it to support charities in doing the most good.

Some of the concerns we would like to raise refer to threats to the moral integrity of people committed to ‘earning to give’, who might be deeply devoted to doing morally good deeds by earning the most money possible in order to spend it for a good cause, e.g. fighting malaria. There are three main areas of influence that might undermine such noble intentions. The first problem described below is selection effects, the second is the impact of studying the economy, and the final one concerns human resources management within the financial sector.

Morality and world-views rarely remain unchanged throughout life, as one’s mindset evolves throughout life. When we enter adolescence, we create our view of morality. This is usually a result of shaping our moral values and understanding of the world. Choosing the subject we are going to study is an important part of this process. In an influential article written by Daniel Kahneman (1986b) and the following research (Frey *et al.* 1993; Cipriani *et al.* 2009; Rubinstein 2006), we can find a strong justification for the argument that there is a negative moral selection of economic students. People who choose to study economics are more selfish, less open for cooperation, and more prone to immoral behaviors than other students (Marwell & Ames 1981; Kahneman *et al.* 1986a; Carter & Irons 1991; Frank *et al.* 1993; Selten & Ockenfels 1998; Frank & Schulze 2000). Young people who, in most cases, are still in the process of their moral formation are exhibited to the influence of selfish, individualistic and self-centered peers. Even if their motivation for choosing a career in the financial sector is noble, they will be affected

by their colleagues.

The second problem is the construction of an economics curriculum. There is ongoing discussion about the way of teaching economy where one of the important aspects is the domination of the technical approach in understanding economics. Important moral outcomes of that process are indicated by researchers dealing with different fields of economics. Sumantra Ghoshal, a management researcher, suggests “that by propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility” (Ghoshal 2005, 76). Researchers dealing with finance education point out that leading universities, which have a Master in Financial Engineering program, lack Business Ethics (10 out of 12) (Roncella & Roncella 2019). Another aspect of the problem is that even when universities have some kind of ethical course, the curriculum is focused on moral codes, rules, compliance and accountability. In order to enhance students’ moral development, one needs to create a learning environment that creates opportunities for taking responsibility (Schillinger 2006). We need more teaching focused on virtues and moral identity rather than rules if we want to foster students’ moral development (Neesham & Gu 2015; Roncella & Roncella 2019; Rochi 2019; Kucz 2019)

People who follow the job advice from 80,000 hours website<sup>2</sup> will not be aware of the risks described above, because they are out of EA concern. That is one of the important downsides of focusing on goals rather than processes, and neglecting the procedures leading to a certain end. We can see the analogous problem in the way we shall work (considered by the thinkers as the next step of implementing their idea).

Working for an organization striving to make the most money possible and trying to use all the possible means to earn more might have a negative impact on the financiers. In the long run, it is hard to imagine how working for a hedge fund would not have an influence on the way you see the world and your own place in it. It is quite possible that engagement in your work will diminish your motivation to maintain your support for a good cause which was initially your motivation.<sup>3</sup> This is especially true when you work in a competitive, challenging and tough work environment. Most hiring managers as well as EA are focused on outcomes, not processes, and they are prone to overlook the difference between good leadership and unethical persuasion (Babiak & Hare 2006; Babiak *et al.* 2010). An assessment based on profits and the short-term results of your work might be damaging for morally based motivations in the long run (Brooks 2013). What happens if in the long run this will lead to losing our moral intuition? How could we justify moral views if we will be concerned only with topics and aspects of the world which can be translated into the most effective ways of action? It is hard to answer these questions,

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<sup>2</sup> This platform was started by MacAskill and provides individual guidelines for those who would like to commit themselves to the ‘earning to give’ career mode.

<sup>3</sup> Singer is aware of this objection, although he fails to refute it. His main argument refers to the personal experience of the EA he knows (Singer 2015, 45–54). In this section, we refer to scientific research on that matter.

but future events might change our view in the long-term influence of EA on our moral behavior.

We might conclude that Singer and MacAskill have created a theory worthy of attention as the exemplification of one of the possible models of reductionism in the sphere of values. This reductionism excludes certain spheres of human life from the realm of moral consideration by claiming that they have a rational and “scientific” character. Rationality is understood as effectiveness. Such an approach to this problem allows reductionists to present their theory as “an intellectual and practical project rather than a normative claim, in the same way that science is an intellectual and practical project rather than a body of any particular normative and empirical claims” (MacAskill 2017, 3). In their analysis, EA quietened the evaluative character of the assumption treating human beings as a “rational machine” making the most out of undertaken charitable actions.

In the case of efficiency understood in terms of neoclassical economy, we have to deal with an additional phenomenon. If we are thinking about different forms of charitable action according to their effectiveness and we consider such evaluation as free from moral values while subjecting it to the laws of the market efficiency, we end up with the marketization of this sphere. Moral values are replaced by economic values. This process can be called the commercialization of values – giving to some form of good, commonly associated with morality, a market value, usually interpreted as a price. It is the movement of a value from the sphere of *dignitas* – values that hold value because of their relationship to human dignity and cannot be exchanged, to the sphere of *pretium* – values that can be exchanged / sold, because they can be measured (Seneca, ep. 71,33).

Michael Sandel describes this process in his book ‘What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets.’ He writes:

This a debate we didn’t have during the era of market triumphalism. As a result without quite realizing it, without ever deciding to do so, we drifted from having a market economy to being a market society. The difference is this: A market economy is a tool – a valuable and effective tool – for organizing productive activity. A market society is a way of life in which market values seep into every aspect of human endeavor. It’s a place where social relations are made over in the image of the market (Sandel 2009, 10).

To show how this was possible, he indicates that economists commonly believe in two tenets of faith in the market.

The first tenet is based on the belief that the introduction of financial incentives to any form of activities does not change it (Sandel 2009, 125). However, there is a lot of research in social psychology that concludes the opposite. In the case of the emergence of a financial incentive people do not think about what their duty is, but focus on what is the most profitable (Schwartz 2009). It turns out that the introduction of financial incentives (and penalties) displaces, crowds-out moral motivations rather than coincides with them (Titmuss *et al.* 1997; Frey & Oberholzer-Gee 1997; Gneezy & Rustichini 2000). In the case of EA, it would mean that implementing it by ‘earning to give’ is impossible, because all in

all, we always end up only with the effective usage of resources, and altruism is crowded-out by economical values.

The second dogma is based on the assumption that benevolent behavior and altruism are limited, and that it can be easily depleted (Sandel 2012, 126). EA would argue in this context that we need to be more effective in our altruistic acts. MacAskill claims that we need to make hard choices about the way we donate to noble causes and the way we spend our time on helping others. That is because, according to him, our resources are limited and the needs of those needing help are enormous “We need to prioritize” (MacAskill 2015, 34). In order to do this, we need to have a method of deciding whether some needs are more important than others.

MacAskill claims that even though income is not the only factor in deciding about our well-being, he writes that: “income certainly plays a critical role in how enjoyable, long and healthy your life is” (MacAskill 2015, 27). Therefore, the conclusion that benefiting others can be understood as raising their income and that proper analysis of the situation can provide us with information on how much money can benefit recipients of our help (MacAskill 2015, 27). The scale of our influence, the opportunity to change the lives of others for the better, the possibility of helping “thousands of people” (MacAskill 2015, 30), and the fact that one hundred dollars in a poor country can make a much greater difference than the same amount of money in a rich country, are all reasons to take action and to decide who we should help. Avoiding such a decision would mean not doing the most we can do in order to help other people (MacAskill 2015, 30).

Matt Wage works for an arbitrage trading firm, and Jason Tigg works for high-frequency trading firms. They both are analytical employees, so they might not have much influence on what their calculations, algorithms, and formulas are used for. Their role is not as simple as stating that they ‘write software that turns a lot of money into even more money’ (Matthews 2013). Neither of them can be absolutely sure that all they do is allow ‘raising investment capital, reducing risk, and smoothing out swings in commodity prices’ (Singer 2015, 50). They might as well contribute to investments in financial instruments that are directly or indirectly involved in speculating on food prices, companies that make a profit by slave labor, very bad working conditions, or semi slave labor, depleting the planet’s natural resources, as well as, or other forms of generating profits by degrading human dignity and the natural environment.

From the EA perspective, these negative effects of their activity are negligible, because it would have been difficult to provide a precise measure of their negative impact. It is worth noting that difficulties in calculating something does not make it disappear, and we should consider the negative effects of financial market activities in our ethical evaluations of decisions and actions. As EA is concentrated on the most good results, the good intentions of actors involved does not change much in the ethical evaluations of their actions. There is no easy way to assess the effects of global markets activity. Why should we be optimistic rather than pessimistic about the outcomes of financial markets



activity?

## 2. Means and Ends

In the first part of our paper, we have described some of the issues related to searching for the best means. Before we move on to the problem of searching for ends, we would like to consider the differentiation between means and ends. According to the EA movement, we can use whatever method necessary in order to achieve the best result in helping others. In this way, means and ends are not distinguished, since the goal is obvious, namely doing the most good possible, and the means are identical with the best method in order to achieve the most good.

However, from the point of view of many ethical theories, means are not ethically neutral and their ethical evaluation cannot be ignored thanks to their greatest impact, or justified by the most noble goal whose achievement they are meant to serve. This is a much deeper ethical problem than it may seem at first glance. MacAskill's way of writing and describing the problems connected with altruism and charity implies that the trade-offs between different actions are either technical or depend on the lack of an effective attitude towards them. The first approach has been analyzed by him many times and he tries to show different methods of searching for the most effective way of achieving a goal. At the same time, he is unable to give a solution when we are talking about different ethical values, and thus, he seems to think that all that matters are technical questions:

Effective altruism, at its core, is about (...) trying our best to make hard trade-offs. Of all the ways in which we could make the world a better place, which will do the most good? Which problems should we tackle immediately, and which should we leave for another time? Valuing one action over another is difficult psychologically and practically, but it is not impossible. In order to make comparisons between actions, we need to ask: How many people benefit, and by how much? This is the first key question of effective altruism (MacAskill 2015, 34).

Ethical decisions involve not only deciding whether we have the best means to achieve a given goal, but also a reflection on whether a particular goal is noble, worthy or good. We need to know not only what the best action in a given circumstance is, but also where this action should lead us. We need to answer questions not only about what needs to be done, but also questions of where we are coming from and where we are heading. This blind spot leads MacAskill to ignore the problem of difference in ethical values, as if what we think about well-being, benefit and what the good life means, could have been taken for granted.

According to effective altruism, cultural, ethical, political differences are something we can ignore or translate into technical differences, because everyone would agree, that they want to do the most good and to be the most effective at it. Maybe they would, but still we may have differences in opinions concerning the goal to which we should direct our most effective actions. By taking a goal for granted and concentrating only on the

best road to achieve it, we would ignore the difficulties in making decisions between goals. We would still be unable to make decisions, since even if we agree about the best way to achieve something, we might disagree about what we want to achieve (Ranciere 1999, 123–125). This is vividly visible in a description of different focus areas of effective altruism, where we can read:

Cooperation is crucial for growing the movement, so I hope that even if it's not always easy, effective altruists will "go out of their way" to cooperate and work together, no matter which focus areas have their sympathies (Muehlhauser 2015, 105–106).

We were supposed to achieve a method of rationally deciding about what to do in order to improve the world. However, in the case of differences between focus areas, which actually entail differences between the goals we want to achieve, there is no method of choosing between different goals. To that extent, the decision about including environmental issues on the list of focus areas of EA seems to depend on having a group of members of the EA movement who would concentrate their efforts on environmental issues (Muehlhauser 2015, 105).

MacAskill tried to answer a similar objection by stating that:

Effective altruism would then be about trying to find out and do those activities that do no less good than those with which they are commensurable. The project would however have relatively little scope if there were rampant incommensurability, e.g., between any two activities that benefit separate individuals. But such rampant incommensurability seems independently implausible (MacAskill & Pummer 2012, 6).

However, there exists a socially recognized way of deciding about different goals, searching for dialogue and understanding ways of making two values that are viewed impossible to compare, closer to each other. This way is called politics. Third part of our paper will consider some political arguments against effective altruism.

### **3. Effective Altruism and Politics**

The third scope of the issues concerning effective altruism discussed in this paper will concern some of the political consequences of this point of view. Claims that our engagement in helping others should be evaluated according to its effectiveness in realizing goals which can be measured and optimized. In this way, this chapter will be a part of an ongoing discussion about systemic (see Snow 2015) and institutional (see Berkey 2017) aspects and the influence of the EA philosophy and movement. We will concentrate on the issues of politics as a process and public discussion as a dialogue about setting goals of communal action. Thus, our views are in some part similar to Snow's critique, and we try indirectly to address some of the arguments provided by Berkey in the defense of EA.



For example, one of the main solutions to the problems of poverty lies in spending money in a better way (MacAskill 2015, 13–20). This rules out, for example, the systemic aspects of environmental hazards (see Welzer 2012) and violence (see Haugen & Boutros 2014) as factors causing premature deaths and a lot of suffering, as well as their influence on poverty, since we can claim that our limited resources and means are hardly able to make a significant change in these areas. This skepticism is visible in both Peter Singer and MacAskill's writings. While writing about the norm of self-interest Singer claims:

most of us are keen to fit in with everyone else, we tell stories about our acts of compassion that put a self-interested face on them. As a result, the norm of self-interest appears to be confirmed, and so the behavior continues. The norm is self-reinforcing and yet socially pernicious, because if we believe that no one else acts altruistically, we are less likely to do it ourselves; the norm becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Singer 2010, 77, 78).

However, a similar criticism could be made against EA itself. The main paradigm of evaluating our decisions remains concentrated on fulfilling interests. The only change that EA wants to achieve is to broaden the groups of beings, entities, groups, that we are going to include in our calculations. Even while considering political actions, Singer stresses how political interests are very hard to change and that: "our efforts are better spent elsewhere, where we can be confident of making a difference" (Singer 2010, 114). For Singer, the only aspect of our behavior, which we need to change, is the scope of our interest-oriented attitude. The interest-oriented way of thinking is not a problem. According to Singer, the best solution would be to apply technical tools of effectiveness to our individual charitable behaviors.

The issue with political discussion and political process is very visible in the simplifications of politics in the perspective of effective altruists. EA might answer that it is not the point, since the EA is about helping others and does not provide a theory to be applied in any decision-making process. However, in another text MacAskill answered the question of applying EA to political decisions:

You should start by asking yourself: How much do I personally expect to gain by having my preferred party in power? If your preferred party is the Republicans, then you might expect to benefit because you'll pay fewer taxes. If your preferred party is the Democrats, you might expect to benefit because you'll receive more government-funded public service. Suppose for the sake of argument you conclude that your preferred party getting into power is worth \$1,000 to you. (...) The government also, of course, makes people better or worse off in other ways, such as through regulation (MacAskill 2015, 78).

In the quotation above that analyzes our relationship with the government, we do not see an altruist anymore. What we should consider first is our personal gain and not any other reason (also ethical reasons) to prefer one over another political party. We see here an old-style egoist whose main concern is what he/she can benefit from choosing this or that faction. Voting is understood by EA as something concerned mainly with personal gains.

World poverty is not a natural disaster. It is connected with the way resources and power are divided, as well as how the social and political systems operate. The financial sector and international financial institutions do not always play a positive role in helping poor countries become richer and to be able to solve their problem with poverty on their own (see Chang 2008). By being a part of the financial sector, you are co-responsible for the very same problems you want to solve by your donations. You foster a world view of evaluating everything according to its financial value and to substitute value with its financial value. The extent of this co-responsibility is not that easy to pin, but it remains an ethical issue in deciding about your future career and about the ethical value of your actions (see Mazzucato 2018, 11–24). Maybe it is a bit of an overblown metaphor, but the EA movement might be compared to someone who would try to solve problems connected with traffic, car accidents and air pollution by working for a car producer and spending half of his salary on donations to organizations working against traffic and car accidents.

The lack of moral framework and the concentration on efficiency and the general idea of well-being leads to justifying actions that are morally dubious. For example, MacAskill jumps to the conclusion that since sweatshops have a positive economic influence and that people who are living in poor countries are willing to work in them, we should agree with the economists who claim that sweatshops are good for poor countries (MacAskill 2015, 113–114).

In the best case scenario, this is morally ambiguous and leads to justifying whatever economic means that can be used in order to make poor countries richer. However, these ways of getting richer are not morally neutral. It is also worth noting that we need to have tools in order to evaluate more and less moral ways of improving the economic situation of those countries. There are better and worse ways. Many of the ways proposed by economists working for international institutions are more concerned with the well-being of rich countries financing those international institutions and not with resolving the economic problems of poor countries (see Chang 2008, 177–181).

Using slave labor, exploiting children and contributing to the profits of mainly international companies, who are main beneficiaries of these kinds of practices, is wrong, even if you spend part of the money gained in this way on charity. All decisions related to helping poor countries need not only an economic perspective to be decided about, but also an ethical and political reflection and perspective. However, these two perspectives are downplayed by EA, as they would have made our actions less effective and slow them down. Providing these perspectives is a very important task for moral philosophers, not in order to discover the one and only way of evaluating all moral decisions, but rather to involve themselves in “the democratic and open-ended process that is needed to develop a common set of basic values in a society” (Hansson 2013, 126)

MacAskill used hyperbole to claim that if we do not have a common measure it means we cannot say whether something is better or worse (MacAskill 2015, 41). A universal viewpoint is possible here because MacAskill uses the cases concerning health

and very generally understood well-being. In our opinion, to conclude from these examples that we can rely on EA for providing tools for solving ethical conflicts, and claiming that we will be able to make comparisons and find the best solutions, is a huge simplification. Ethical conflicts are very often about the gray areas between different values and priorities, that cannot be solved by scientific quantitative methods (Elzenberg 1994, 411–412). They also involve measures of what is good and what is evil, and the hierarchy of ethical values. We need frameworks and possibilities to discuss these differences in values (Mouffe 2000, 101–105).

By denying the influence of relations with other people on his decisions about helping others, MacAskill claims to achieve fairness; however, in this way, he needs to say that fairness is more important than any other value, than our inner feelings, empathy, etc. (MacAskill 2015, 42). Of course, he can have such an opinion, but we do not think that we can reduce ethics to fairness. Why is this obligation to be fair applied to charity and the amount of money and time we decide to use to help others, and not to all the other relations and aspects of our life? Who or what decides on placing such a limit on the fairness principle? Is there a place for empathy? Can we really go so far as to say that helping others means saving lives and improving the lives of people of whom we should not have any personal opinion, with whom we should not have any personal connections, because this could diminish our ability to rationally decide about the most effective way to help?

When responding to similar objections concerning lack of taking into consideration ethical restrictions and norms, MacAskill claimed that: “effective altruism is the project of using evidence and reason to try to find out how to do the most good, and on this basis trying to do the most good, without violating constraints” (Pummer & MacAskill 2019, 5). This however, does not answer the main point of this argument, namely, what are those constraints, how to decide about them, whether being a part of a harmful economic system already is beyond these constraints? We think there might be a strong argument for such a case, especially in trading stocks of firms selling weapons or exploiting the weakness of institutions in poor states (Haugen & Boutros 2014). However, EA does not expect such problems to arise, since everyone should agree that we should do the most good possible.

## Conclusion

Effective altruism encourages us to check how much good we can using our money. We understand the intention standing behind such a calculation and we respect it to some extent. However, we do not think that we can still call it altruism. On the one hand, effective altruism tries to build up the best moral framework; while, on the other, it leaves most of our actions out of the equation, since they are not something effective altruists are concerned with. The limits of the theory are built up in a such a way that it should be

helpful to justify it, but at the same time, it allows for arguing that everything else is not the part of the theory. The world seems not to work in such an analytical manner. Connections between ethics, the economy and politics do exist and philosophical reflection will not abstain from trying to describe them. Of course, attempts to provide them will sometimes end up with mistakes and will not always provide us with satisfactory answers. This does not mean that it is better to close your eyes and pretend that these connections do not exist and that you can solve the world's problems without concerning yourself with the difficult gordian knots of relations between values, power and decision making.

EA tends to believe that focusing on efficiency leads to a situation in which empathy and kindness are not a relevant issue, in which means can be evaluated in a technical manner and goals are unproblematic and common. What they appear to underestimate is that morality might be weakened by concentration on impersonal help only, without any association with the beneficiaries of our help. Even if they are right in making such claims about ethical values, they should also consider other ethical attitudes, other goals and other understandings of "the best we can do". They have created an image of a moral theory that is scientifically and ideologically neutral, and they have missed the moral costs of the market mechanisms' functioning within it. We have presented these costs in this paper, with three main aspects of them being the commercialization of values, limits on thinking about goals as given, as well as the political context in which EA helpers are acting. In other words, EA takes a shortcut in moral discussions and applies effectiveness as a common ground for ethical evaluation of charitable action. In our eyes that is a mistake.

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### **The Ethical, Political and Economic Challenges of Effective Altruism**

**Abstract:** This paper presents a critical evaluation of ethical and philosophical concerns about the effective altruism as an ethical position. Effective altruists claim that one of our important ethical obligations is to do the most good possible, with the biggest possible positive impact. This impact should be measured with rational tools and by evaluating the effectiveness of our actions. At first glance, this might seem as a consensus building position, a good starting point for building a community of people wanting to change the world for the better. In our paper, we present some difficulties which are connected with such a way of thinking about charity and an ethical obligation to donate. We discuss the problem of the commercialization of ethical values, understanding effectiveness, agreeing about goals, as well as the political consequences of effective altruism understood as an ethical position.

**Keywords:** effective altruism; values; charity; philosophy of economy; means; goals.

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